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A Recounting of the Stages of French Communist Resistance during World War II and its Relationship to the French Resistance Overall

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Abstract

This paper will recount the stages of communist resistance in France during World War Two and its relationship to the French Resistance overall, as well as analyse the effect that communist resistance in France had on the war. It will outline the position of the French Communist Party (PCF) in three different and distinctive periods: pre-1939, 1939 to the German invasion of the USSR in 1941, and from Operation Barbarossa to the liberation of France. This paper uses primary and secondary sources to create as balanced and objective an essay as possible. It will show that, for most of its existence, the PCF had been operating in a clandestine state and was thus the best prepared of any group for the outbreak of hostilities. The Communists were not necessarily late in joining the war, with resistance as we know it only beginning when the Communists began to resist. The relationship between the communist resisters and the other resistance groups is discussed, with particular reference to de Gaulle and shows the large degree of autonomy that the Communists maintained. What can be said with certainty of communist resistance in France is that it prevented greater casualties among the Allies through its acts of sabotage and its engagement of the enemy. This dissertation challenges the myth of the French Resistance and asserts that the Communists had the greatest influence of any group in the Resistance.

Keywords: Communism; France; World War Two

This paper will recount the stages of communist resistance in France and its relationship to the French Resistance overall, as well as analyse the effect that communist resistance in France had on the war. It will outline the position of the French Communist Party (PCF) in three different and distinctive periods: pre-1939, 1939 to the German invasion of the USSR in 1941, and from the launch of Operation Barbarossa to the liberation of France. It will suggest a link between the Communist Party's position in the Popular Front Government of the mid 1930s and the position it found itself in following the German invasion of France and the Nazi-Soviet Non-aggression Pact. It will show that the Communist Party was arguably the

best suited group to operate an effective resistance to Vichy and the Nazis as not only had it been marginalised and oppressed by the French state since its conception, but it was also banned by Daladier's government in 1939 and was, thus, accustomed to operating clandestinely. The paper will contend that communist resistance only began to occur following the invasion by Germany of the Soviet Union, it will outline the influence of the Communist International on the French Communist Party and it will highlight the effect that the French Communist Party leader, Maurice Thorez, had on his party, given that he spent the entire war in Moscow. It will show that when the Communists did begin to resist, they quickly became arguably the most proactive group in the Resistance. The paper will outline the relationship that the communist resisters had with the other resistance groups and particularly with de Gaulle and it will contend that, although it agreed to join the Conseil National de la Resistance, in reality the PCF retained almost the same degree of autonomy and, despite the glaring ideological differences between them, the relationship between de Gaulle and the Communists was not as strained as one might believe. It will also be shown that communist activity sometimes harmed the Resistance; carrying out assassinations was not always welcomed by the French as retaliation for killing German soldiers was generally inflicted on the local population. It will be suggested that the Service du travail obligatoire (STO) programme, the German occupation of the southern zone, and German reprisals and brutality, caused a significant rise in civil disobedience and increased support for the communist resisters. Finally, the paper will contend that the PCF's significant role in the Resistance led to its acceptance into the folds of French society and politics in a way that it had never been before and was the most important factor in its rise in popularity, becoming the largest left-wing French party until the 1970s.

When the Communists eventually entered the war in the summer of 1941, they were arguably the group that was most capable of engaging in an effective resistance, for they had significant experience in operating on the margins of society, as well as being oppressed and hunted by the State. Sean McMeekin tells us of Henri Barbe, one of the main leaders of the PCF after 1928, and his pursuit by the French authorities: "From 1928 to 1933 Barbe was pursued by the French authorities for various offences that together merited thirteen years in prison, Barbe was escorted around the PCF's network of safe houses by a veritable team of agents when in the country."¹ McMeekin also informs us of Albert Vassart, Paris liaison for the Comintern from 1932 to 1934, who used encryption techniques in telegraphing messages between Paris and Moscow, and assisted "the distribution of false passports, 'specially prepared' suitcases and travel clothes with secret pockets to French agents going abroad."² Although both of these individuals were forced to leave the party and became collaborationist and anti-communist during the war, we can see from their experiences that French communists already had a network of safe houses and systems of remaining undetected by enemy agents. It is possible to say that the Communists were already operating in a mild state of war, so when they began to engage in hostilities in 1941 they possessed a skillset that would enable them to be effective resisters.

Moscow began to exert a strong influence on the French Communist Party, which steadily increased as the 1930s wore on and resulted in the PCF's refusal to engage or even criticise the Nazis during the first phase of the war, at Moscow's behest. Comintern money financed almost all PCF expenditure and resulted in the PCF leadership serving the interests of their financiers first, even when they did not align with those of party members: "Dependence on the flow of Soviet money, which could be withdrawn at any time, secured

¹ S. McMeekin, "From Moscow to Vichy: Three Working-Class Militants and the French Communist Party, 1920-1940," *Contemporary European History* 9, no. 1 (2000): 16.

² *Ibid.*, 27.

Bolsheviks' direct control of PCF policy.”³ The Comintern had also decreed that the PCF would implement the controversial electoral policy of class against class, which included attacking the Socialists and thereby weakening the French left.⁴ It was the Popular Front though that confirmed Moscow’s total control of the PCF. PCF policy was made subservient to Soviet foreign policy, “Stalin was changing tactics for specific geopolitical reasons, in order to strengthen the left in France and secure a military alliance against Hitler.”⁵ The PCF’s meek acquiescence to this complete change in tactics is proof of the loss of its ability to make independent decisions and policies.⁶ It is quite fair to say then that any credit or benefit that the PCF obtained for the Popular Front government was unearned, given that the decision came from the Comintern. Blind obedience to Moscow’s edicts was the key to advancing in the PCF and this is personified by its leader, Maurice Thorez, who would “never express an opinion without first discussing the issue with Eugen Fried, the Comintern’s local party overseer.”⁷ When one acknowledges that the Popular Front was encouraged by Moscow with the intention of forming an alliance against Hitler, it is quite remarkable that Stalin signed a pact with Hitler that arguably paved the way for the Germans to invade France. The self-serving nature of Moscow was clear and the policies that it forced on the PCF in the 1930s can be seen as precursors towards the non-aggression policy forced on French communists until the summer of 1941.

When criticising the Communists for failing to launch an armed resistance before Operation Barbarossa, it is important to note that there was little to no armed resistance from other groups or parties either. The French Resistance grew in size and strength as the war continued and, when this is acknowledged, it is possible to see the French communists’ so-called late entry into the war a bit differently. It is also necessary to highlight the actions taken by Daladier’s government against the French communists in retaliation for the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. The French government “began a full-scale persecution of the PCF, banning *L’Humanite*, arresting communist deputies, dissolving the party and sending leading militants to prison camps.”⁸ It can be argued, from a French communist’s perspective that an armed struggle that simply returned the previous regime was not worth fighting for. This can be furthered with the insistence by the Comintern that the war was an imperialist war and that France was an aggressor, not Germany. A legitimate response by the Communist Party when asked why it did not order its members to resist would be: “when did any delegation of the Socialist Party tell its members to engage in armed resistance?”⁹ It is necessary to point out a certain double standard when accusations are levelled at the PCF. It has been estimated that no less than two percent of the French population (about 400,000 people) were active resisters, while ten percent of the French population were passive resisters.¹⁰ Statistics like these show not only the resistance myth and the importance of the Communists to the Resistance, but also that it is unfair to judge the Communists’ war record too harshly considering that the vast majority of the French people chose to passively collaborate.

³ Ibid., 3.

⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁸ D. Sassoon, “The Rise and Fall of West European Communism 1939-48,” *Contemporary European History* 1, no. 2 (1992): 141, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0960777300004410>.

⁹ D. Pike, “Between the Junes: The French Communists from the Collapse of France to the Invasion of Russia,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 28, no. 3 (1993): 467, doi:10.1177/002200949302800304.

¹⁰ T. Crowdy, *French Resistance Fighter: France’s Secret Army* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2007), 8.

“In the twelve months that followed the armistice and the establishment of the Vichy government, communist resistance in France accomplished very little of note”.¹¹ Until May 1941, the illegal PCF’s activities consisted of reconstructing its party cells and distributing its clandestine publications, particularly *L’Humanite*, which had also been banned by Daladier’s government.¹² The PCF press almost never mentioned the fact of the occupation and obviously carried no call for active opposition to the German presence.¹³ To give some credit to the Communists during this period, they were clear in their disdain for Petain and their rejection of Vichy ideology.¹⁴ Their views on Petain were to be proved correct when his purge of the political left soon extended to include Jews and Freemasons, groups that did not conform to Petain’s Revolution Nationale vision.¹⁵ *L’Humanite* was one of the few publications to denounce Vichy for its anti-Semitism, which can be found in its Marseille edition of October 1940.¹⁶ French communists did much to assist the Jews throughout the war, which will be discussed later. What can be said positively about the Communists during this time is that some communist resistance pockets did form, in the Occupied Zone rather than in Vichy, but not in Paris and without contact with the PCF leaders in the capital.¹⁷ These pockets, in Nantes, Bordeaux and the region of Limoges, began by distributing anti-Nazi pamphlets, and by the end of August 1940 had progressed to small acts of sabotage.¹⁸ Sources from both Vichy and the Germans indicate to us the lack of communist activity during this period. The French prefects’ reports reveal that communist resistance until the summer of 1941 consisted almost entirely of the printing and distribution of propaganda.¹⁹ The Wehrmacht reports from 1940 reveal that three German divisions in France reported on the lack of attacks by Communists on the occupying forces, while in May 1941, a report from the commandant of German troops in Paris attributed the majority of acts of sabotage in the area to the non-communist resistance.²⁰ While this proves to us the lack of communist resistance at this time, it also shows the impact of the PCF on its members, as, generally speaking, the vast majority of its members adhered to its policy of non-aggression towards the Nazis. It shows the organisation and discipline of its members, which would become a big advantage for the Resistance once the Communists entered the war.

The Party began negotiating with the Germans in the months directly following the armistice to get its popular newspaper *L’Humanite* legalised again.²¹ This fact was quite embarrassing to the PCF in later years for it showed its willingness to co-operate with the Germans. The question of whether to negotiate with the Germans was taken up by Thorez, the head of the PCF. In telegrams sent by him, he urged the Party to essentially remain neutral in the conflict.²² Thorez spent the war in Moscow and he instructed his representatives in France not to engage at all with either the Nazis or Vichy, as he believed the Nazis desired to use the Communists to control the working class. He cautioned them against negotiating with the Germans on this point as he suggested that this would assist the

¹¹ Pike, “Between the Junes,” 467.

¹² H. R. Kedward, *La Vie En Bleu: France and the French since 1900* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), 180.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ H. R. Kedward, “Life in Occupied France, 1940 – 1944: An Overview of Attitudes, Experiences and Choices.” *Post War Europe: Refugees, Exile and Resettlement, 1945-1950* (n.d.) <http://www.gale.cengage.com/pdf/whitepapers/gdc/LifeInOccupiedFrance.pdf>

¹⁶ Kedward, *La Vie En Bleu*, 180.

¹⁷ Pike, “Between the Junes,” 467.

¹⁸ Ibid., 468.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 469.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 288–9.

Nazis in tainting by association the only organised, honest political force left in France: the Communist Party.²³ The request was refused, but this and the communist leaders, Francois Billoux's and Virgile Barel's offers to serve as witnesses in the trials of Léon Blum, Prime Minister of France during the Popular Front government of the mid 1930s, and Édouard Daladier, Prime Minister of France at the outbreak of the war, in Riom (which was refused by Vichy and would have seen the Communists testify against their former Popular Front allies and also assist Vichy) serves to prove the extent of the communist collaboration.²⁴ Any fears at this stage that the Germans may have had of the Communists were not caused by anything the Communists actually did, but rather simply because they were communists. There was no appeal to engage in violence by the PCF, and no violent action by a communist appears in the communist press until after 22 June 1941.²⁵ Any communist then that actively struggled against the Nazis before this date "acted not merely without the Party's backing, but in open violation of the Party's orders."²⁶ Madeleine Baudoin, a resistance fighter from Marseille, discussed the strangeness of the PCF's stance during this period in an interview with Rod Kedward. She states that the Communists in her locality were hostile to Vichy and Petain, but they were silent on the subject of the Germans: they were "against the valet but not his master."²⁷

The German invasion of the Soviet Union secured the PCF's total commitment to any and all forms of action against the Nazis, for it now had the permission of the Comintern to do so. The Communists were in quite a healthy position to do this, as they were somewhat prepared for the probability of hostilities commencing and were organised and moderately armed. Thorez's tone completely changed in his telegram from 25 June 1941, where he urged both collaboration and contact with Gaullist resistance on the basis of national liberation. He also declares that action must be taken in both zones, against the Nazis and against Vichy who he referred to as traitors. He suggested that strikes be used to hinder any factory that was used to support the German military in its war against the Soviet Union and that the Communist Party should promote the war as a war against Fascist aggression, rather than a defence of communism, in order to secure wider support and co-operation.²⁸ The Communists were the first to begin the assassination of German soldiers, the first being carried out by Colonel Fabien at Barbes metro station on 21 August 1941.²⁹ Subsequent assassinations which occurred in Lille, Nantes and Bordeaux, left the Germans in no doubt that different tactics were needed now that the Communists had entered the war. Communist resisters were generally accepted as being by far the most eager to actually fight the Germans and were arguably more useful to the Allies because of this. The PCF united its disparate armed groups into a single organisation, the Francs-Tireurs et Partisans Français (FTP). The FTP, led by Charles Tillon, soon began recruiting volunteers in all the main towns, creating a series of potent guerrilla squads.³⁰ The adoption of guerrilla tactics was necessary since the PCF knew that it would have no chance against the Germans in a sustained battle, particularly in 1941-2 when the German Army had an aura of invincibility attached to it. The PCF launched the Front National, influenced somewhat by the success of the Popular Front, which

²³ B. H. Bayerlein et al., eds., *Moscou, Paris, Berlin* (Paris: Editions Tallandier, 2003), <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/thorez/1940/reactions-occupiers.htm>.

²⁴ Pike, "Between the Junes," 474.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 479.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 480.

²⁷ H. R. Kedward, *Resistance in Vichy France* (Oxford: OUP, 1978), 276–278.

²⁸ M. Abidor, trans. "Long Live the Unity of the French Government." Moscow: Radio Moscow, August 31, 1944. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/thorez/1944/long-live.htm>

²⁹ Kedward, *La Vie En Bleu*, 287.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 288–9.

was used to attract non-communist partisans into active resistance.³¹ The FTP operated with a large degree of autonomy particularly at this juncture, for the principle concern of the Communists was to keep as many German divisions in France as possible, so that they were not fighting in the East against the Soviet Union.

FTP armed action did incur German Army reprisals, which were generally inflicted on the population where the incident took place. The impact that FTP action and German reprisals had could be quite varied. A decree by Hitler issued on 16 September 1941 stated that the death of a German soldier should be followed by the execution of 50 to 100 communists.³² A hostage plan was then implemented in France, where the Nazis unsurprisingly made a point of placing former deputies and officials of the PCF at the top of the hostage lists. These former deputies and officials were closely followed on the lists by intellectuals who had shown support for communism. In total, each district was to have identified around 150 hostages, while 300-400 were chosen for Paris.³³ Although Hitler's order stated that the people to be executed were to be communists, in reality a significant number of those executed had no links to the PCF or to communism in general. Communist assassinations then had the potential to cause anger in the areas where an assassination was carried out and could actually do more harm to the Resistance than good, particularly if the assassin was not a local. The ambiguity of the effectiveness of the assassination programme as a tactic can be seen in the effect of the assassination of Lieutenant-Colonel Hotz, the Feldkommandant of Nantes on 20 October 1941. The gunman was Gilbert Brustlein, a communist, who had recently come by train from Paris to Nantes to continue the campaign against German military personnel.³⁴ The population of Nantes was horrified by the assassination. Hotz was seen to be much more of a gentleman officer than a Nazi, and there was a fear that he would be replaced by a real Nazi.³⁵ On 22 October forty-eight people were shot by the Germans, and the forty-eight fell into three distinct groups: twenty-seven communists from the Chateaubriant camp, sixteen prisoners in Nantes including six veterans' leaders, and five Nantais held at Fort Romainville in Paris.³⁶ In order to avoid a further fifty executions, the local authorities became closer collaborators with the Germans.³⁷ The assassination of Hotz was met with anger by the locals, particularly the relatives of the forty-eight, with the gunman forever seen by many of them as a killer rather than a resister.³⁸ This began a debate among resistance groups of the benefits of this kind of action, considering the threat to resistance support that can occur in local populations, given the severity of the German reaction to assassinations.³⁹ While in many cases assassinations and the German reprisals in response worked in the Resistance's favour, Brustlein's act was not highlighted by the PCF because of the unpopularity of his deed.⁴⁰ In total, 30,000 people were executed over the course of the war by the Germans in response to resistance operations.⁴¹ With a casualty list this high, there was always going to be some local anger at the Resistance, but the disruption and fear that the constant attacks had on the occupying forces, as well as the significant German Army presence in France as a result, arguably justified this tactic.

³¹ Ibid., 289.

³² Ibid., 288.

³³ Crowdy, *French Resistance Fighter*, 11.

³⁴ R. Gildea, "Resistance, Reprisals and Community in Occupied France," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 13 (2003): 164.

³⁵ Ibid., 166.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 184.

³⁹ Kedward, *La Vie En Bleu*, 288.

⁴⁰ Gildea, "Resistance, Reprisals and Community in Occupied France," 182.

⁴¹ Crowdy, *French Resistance Fighter*, 11.

The German occupation of the whole of France in November 1942, as well as the extension of the STO programme, had a dramatic effect on the war and on communist resistance. German rule and brutality was then felt in areas of France that had been shielded from it by the existence of Vichy and so resistance activity and support by the French in the south began to increase.⁴² Before 1943, resistance activity and particularly communist resistance activity was generally focused on the cities, where it was easier to hide and there was access to a ready stream of recruits.⁴³ The French countryside was where communist support was traditionally at its weakest, so the extension of the STO programme to include farm labourers was a significant act in the war, since it also dealt a severe blow to the support of Vichy and Petain. This policy caused a surge in the numbers of the Maquis, a rural resistance movement that used guerrilla warfare tactics, with the majority of its members being under twenty-five and working class.⁴⁴ The FTP Maquis soon became very strong and Vichy administrators were unable to enter and mayors began to resign in areas where it had control.⁴⁵ The men of the Maquis generally had a strong desire to fight, and so had a choice to join either the FTP or one of the groups that made up the Mouvements Unis de la Resistance (MUR). The FTP was known to be the group more committed to direct action, usually in small mobile groups, while the MUR regarded itself as an army in waiting for a future battle.⁴⁶ It is no surprise then that many who chose to join the FTP were not communists and there was a real sense among the MUR and the Free French that they were losing the initiative to the FTP.⁴⁷ The progression in hostilities can be seen in the difference in the number of armed actions by the FTP-MOI group in Paris. It carried out sixteen armed actions against the Nazis in the second half of 1942, while in the first half of 1943 this rose to forty-three.⁴⁸ This not only served as a major irritation to the Nazis, but it also assisted in the FTP's recruitment, particularly among Eastern European immigrants who mainly joined communist organised urban groups due to their notorious proclivity for direct action. The sacrifice of these communist immigrants when they were captured often had a very positive effect on public opinion for it inspired and often shamed some French people into supporting the Resistance.⁴⁹

The bravery of the communist resister in carrying out armed actions can be seen in Walter Lipgens' insistence that a group that attempted such action was committing suicide. Until 1944, because the totalitarian police and control apparatus remained effective, terror-actions were extremely difficult and almost impossible to get away with.⁵⁰ Fatalities in the networks due to betrayal and German counter-measures were huge, and this was especially true for communist resistance groups as their high profile and willingness to kill Nazis made them arguably the recipient of the most attention by the Germans. The Communists were also involved in the saving of Jews and it can be estimated that they saved thousands of lives through networks of escape and safe houses.⁵¹ Lipgens says that the main activities of resistance groups between 1940 and 1944 consisted of two things: sheltering persecuted people and printing underground literature that highlighted the crimes and injustices of the

⁴² Kedward, *La Vie En Bleu*, 295.

⁴³ M. Cobb, *The Resistance: The French Fight against the Nazis* (London: Pocket Books, 2010), 171.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁴⁵ Kedward, *La Vie En Bleu*, 297.

⁴⁶ Cobb, *The Resistance*, 172.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁵⁰ W. Lipgens, "European Federation in the Political Thought of Resistance Movements during World War II," *Central European History* 1, no. 1 (1968): 7, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0008938900014758>.

⁵¹ Cobb, *The Resistance*, 207–9.

Nazi regime.⁵² This, however, is unfair to the armed activity of the Communists and the huge role they played in the liberation of Corsica, which occurred in 1943. The liberation of Corsica in October of that year was accomplished by armed resisters who were mostly attached to the National Front, which had a significant communist core.⁵³ While it can be argued that the PCF was keen to liberate Corsica in order to accelerate the war on the Western Front and thereby reduce the pressure on the USSR, it was also a massive propaganda victory for the Communists and increased their profile both in France and abroad.⁵⁴ In total the liberation of Corsica left 75 French, 245 Italians and 1,000 Germans dead.⁵⁵ The confidence that this gave the Communists cannot be overstated. The Communists' liberation of Corsica proved their immense value and position in the resistance; it also showed that they were loyal to the Gaullist vision by their restraint and their setting up of a coalition of resistance forces to run the island until the end of the war.⁵⁶

As can be seen in their actions in Corsica, the Communists were becoming slowly more integrated into the Resistance, while still retaining a large degree of autonomy. The integration of resistance movements began first with the MUR in the south in January of 1943, but Jean Moulin, the great unifier of the French resistance groups who later became the symbol of the Resistance, quickly realised that the FTP and Front National were becoming so infamous and successful that they were attracting non-communists into their ranks. Accordingly, he recommended to de Gaulle that they also be integrated into a centralised resistance, the Conseil National de la Resistance (CNR).⁵⁷ In reality very little changed as the local FTP commanders were still in charge of their troops, there was simply greater integration and co-operation between the resistance groups. Communists became further united with the other resistance members following their inclusion into the Comité Français de Libération Nationale (CFLN) in April of 1944 and in the Provisional Government that was set up in Algiers on 3 June.⁵⁸ Fernand Grenier, who had arrived in London in January 1943 as the PCF's official delegate to La France Combattante, had "confirmed the goodwill and co-operative attitude, however relative they might be, of the PCF and would enter the Provisional Government as 'commissaire a lair' in April 1944."⁵⁹ The setting up of the CFLN integrated the Communists into the political apparatus of the Resistance, while its military wing, the FTP, was integrated into the French Forces of the Interior (FFI).⁶⁰ The inclusion of the FTP in this organisation is important as by then the FTP was unquestionably the largest military group in the Resistance. As well as giving the FFI greater legitimacy with the inclusion of the Communists, the western Allies and de Gaulle were still afraid of a communist revolution, so their integration was important to ensure that this did not happen. This fear was not exactly irrational as the PCF for most of the 1930s and 1940s had been operating much more as communists than as Frenchmen.

An evaluation of the Communists' relationship with the Resistance overall must look in depth at its relationship with de Gaulle, for de Gaulle's influence particularly in the war's closing years began to grow exponentially. De Gaulle was arguably friendlier with the USSR than he might normally have been, given the ideological differences, but the USSR did

⁵² Lipgens, "European Federation in the Political Thought of Resistance Movements," 8.

⁵³ Kedward, *La Vie En Bleu*, 297.

⁵⁴ Cobb, *The Resistance*, 193.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Kedward, *La Vie En Bleu*, 291–2.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 292.

⁵⁹ J. H. B. Bennett, "Aragon's 'Le Crime Contre L'esprit': A Resistance Text of Communist Origin Used by de Gaulle and La Combattante in Algiers, 1943–1944," *The Modern Language Review* 98, no. 3 (2003): 575.

⁶⁰ Cobb, *The Resistance*, 234.

recognise de Gaulle's Free French Committee before Britain.⁶¹ De Gaulle made certain gestures to the Communists to show that they were an included and valued member of the Resistance. De Gaulle adopted the PCF's slogan 'national liberation cannot be separated from national insurrection'⁶², while also accepting the Communists' call for a purge and even the trial and imprisonment of various former officials and supporters of Vichy still in Algeria, the most relevant of them being Pierre Pucheu.⁶³ Although cracks did occur between de Gaulle and the PCF, both realised that the unity of the resistance groups was vital for the successful expulsion of the enemy, and de Gaulle knew that he needed the support of the PCF to gain greater respect from the Allies as the Resistance's acknowledged head. De Gaulle and the PCF were both aware of and operated within the belief that the world during the war years had become quite simple, the Fascists were on one side and anyone willing to fight them was allied, for now, against them.

The Allied landings in Normandy on 6 June 1944 activated and energised the Resistance further, for it was their task to slow the Germans down by immobilising railways and cutting telephone lines.⁶⁴ The FTP was also tasked with engaging the enemy in order to tie German soldiers down and prevent them from being moved to Normandy to assist in the repelling of the invasion.⁶⁵ The PCF was anxious for this invasion to get underway, for it was still subservient to the needs of the Soviet Union and the opening up of a new theatre of war was a sure way of securing a Fascist defeat. The FTP continued its guerrilla tactics, which angered the Germans into severe reprisals against the locals, such as in Tulle where ninety-nine random men were publicly hanged.⁶⁶ The consequence of reprisals like these was that tens of thousands of people joined the Resistance in the last stages of the liberation to finally push the Nazis out.⁶⁷ The PCF's effort in the war was shown by the inclusion of Charles Tillon, leader of the FTP, in de Gaulle's first government of liberated France on 9 September.⁶⁸ The PCF showed its commitment to the idea of a united resistance and a liberated France by its disbanding of its armed police force, the Milices Patriotiques.⁶⁹ The impact of this on the relationship between the Communists and de Gaulle can be seen in de Gaulle's pardon of the PCF leader, Thorez, for deserting and spending the year in Moscow. In January of 1945, Thorez committed his party to supporting "one army, one police, one administration."⁷⁰

It is clear that French communist involvement in World War Two is complicated. The experiences of the PCF in the 1920s and 1930s at the hands of the French government had made it the ideal organisation to begin resisting the Nazis, since it was so used to acting clandestinely. The PCF's subsequent domination by the Comintern, though, resulted in it acquiescing meekly to Moscow's edicts. The consequence of this was that the PCF was forced to be cordial to the Nazis until June of 1941 and it is an embarrassment that it has been attempting to justify since the outbreak of the war. The Communists, however, were not necessarily late in joining the war; indeed it is possible to say that the Resistance as we know it only truly began when the Communists entered the war. Their willingness to actively engage the enemy became known both in and outside of France, with successes like the

⁶¹ Sassoon, "The Rise and Fall," 148.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Bennett, "Aragon's 'Le Crime Contre L'esprit'," 576.

⁶⁴ Kedward, *La Vie En Bleu*, 300.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 301.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 276.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 279.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

liberation of Corsica adding real impetus and confidence to their activities. The assassination tactics that the Communists used did have certain drawbacks, for example, some 30,000 civilians were executed by the Nazis in retaliation for assassinations and these turned local populations against the Resistance. The Communists soon became the largest and most important group in the Resistance and so their integration was greatly desired by Moulin and then de Gaulle. The integration of the Communists into the Resistance can be seen in the FFI becoming synonymous with the Resistance as a whole and their initials were seen all over the country.⁷¹ The perception of the Communists as being separate from the other groups in the Resistance began to diminish, and this is seen in much of the writing on the war where, after the Normandy landings, there is evidence of historians commenting on FFI activity instead of FTP activity. It is imperative not to overstate the importance of the French Resistance though, as only Albania and Yugoslavia were actually liberated by their resistance groups.⁷² What can be said with certainty of the communist resistance in France is that it prevented greater casualties among the Allies, through its acts of sabotage and its engagement of the enemy. The change in the perception of the Communists can be seen in their impressive electoral achievement in the post-war elections, when they became the largest French party in the country and in the National Assembly. It had also become a truly national party with at least one deputy returned in virtually each district, making it the most nationally established of all French parties.⁷³ The difficulty in assessing this period can be seen in the Communists' attempts to deceive the French public by trying to take a larger share of the credit for the earlier years of resistance than they were due.⁷⁴ Despite the attempted misinformation that is to be expected really, the Communists were still the most important resistance group. When contrasting communist resistance with the rest of the Resistance, one must acknowledge there is a marked difference in the reasons both had for fighting and in what they hoped to achieve by resisting. For the rest of the Resistance, the cause and aim can be stated simply, a free France, while the French Communists' lack of action before 1941 proves their motives were different and that the loyalty of the PCF, and particularly the Party leadership, was to the Soviet Union. The Communists' ideologically motivated decision to withhold entry into the war until June of 1941 and the dubious loyalty this showed are important points to highlight, yet the PCF still had the greatest influence of any group in the Resistance, to the extent that communists became synonymous with the Resistance in the memory of the French people.

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⁷¹ Ibid., 234.

⁷² Sassoon, "The Rise and Fall," 150.

⁷³ Ibid., 159.

⁷⁴ The Manchester Guardian, "The Second French Elections." *The Manchester Guardian*. June 1, 1946. ProQuest Document ID: 478674383. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian (1821-2003)

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